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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 003471

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [KISL](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT AND MUSLIM INSURGENTS LARGELY AGREE ON
TERRITORY; GOVERNANCE STILL AT ISSUE

REF: A. MANILA 3392 (SECURITY ADVISOR ON WAY FORWARD IN

MILF PEACE PROCESS)

[B.](#) MANILA 3313 (GOVERNMENT AND MILF NARROW
DIFFERENCES ON TERRITORY)

[C.](#) MANILA 3193 (MUSLIM INSURGENTS MULL GOVERNMENT
TERRITORIAL OFFER)

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1.](#) (C) Summary: The Philippine government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) have largely settled their differences over territory and revenue sharing for a new Muslim political entity, while leaving governance issues for future negotiations. Presidential Peace Advisor Dureza expressed optimism to Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission that an October 23 executive session in Malaysia would set the stage for the resumption of peace talks, and the signing of a territorial agreement. The Ambassador underscored continuing U.S. support for a lasting and workable peace, and reiterated USG willingness to move with alacrity to help support a new agreement with assistance projects. Dureza hopes to gain Congressional approval of enabling legislation for the enlarged Muslim political entity before mid-2008. In a further sign of progress, the often-postponed tripartite conference between the government, the other main Muslim insurgency (MNLF), and Organization of Islamic Conference to review implementation of the 1996 final peace pact is tentatively scheduled for November 6-7 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. End Summary.

[2.](#) (C) During an October 19 breakfast meeting with the Ambassador and DCM, Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process Jesus "Jess" Dureza was upbeat about the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) peace process. Government and MILF negotiators largely settled their differences over territory to be included in a new, broadened Muslim political entity in recent back-channel communications facilitated by Malaysia. Dureza expects an October 23 executive session in Kuala Lumpur to set the stage for the resumption of peace talks and the signing of a territorial agreement, possibly during November.

[3.](#) (C) Dureza explained that governance issues would be addressed separately after official peace talks resume because Philippine Cabinet members have yet to reach a consensus on the nature of self-determination for a new Muslim political entity. Separating the issue of governance from the issue of territory allowed both parties to show progress in the negotiations to their constituencies, explained Dureza.

[4.](#) (C) The Ambassador welcomed the progress in the negotiations, and encouraged Dureza to maintain the positive momentum that appeared to be developing. She reiterated the USG's strong commitment to providing development assistance that would help bring lasting security and prosperity to Mindanao, and noted that the U.S. could move rapidly to help support a new agreement with assistance.

[5.](#) (C) Dureza said that the constitutional process, which requires a plebiscite to create a new Muslim political entity, was now viewed "with understanding" by Malaysia and the MILF. Dureza added that he was increasingly engaging members of Congress on the peace talks, hoping to gain passage of legislation for a new Muslim political entity, tentatively to be known as the "Bangsamoro Region." He said he would like to achieve this before mid-2008 in order to overtake scheduled elections in the current Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. At the same time, legislative provisions authorizing the new Bangsamoro Region would be "downloaded" into the existing provisions from the 1996 final peace pact with the other major Muslim group, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), explained Dureza, to improve the prospects for settling the decades-old conflict in Mindanao. The Ambassador strongly encouraged Dureza to continue his efforts in advancing the peace process with Congressional

support.

16. (C) In a further sign of progress in Mindanao, Dureza said that the oft-delayed tripartite conference between the government, MNLF, and Organization of Islamic Conference on implementation of the 1996 accord has been tentatively scheduled for November 6-7 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Deputy Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process Nabil Tan will be a member of the government delegation reviewing implementation of the 1996 final peace pact. According to Dureza, the Makati Regional Trial Court has yet to decide whether to allow MNLF Chairman Nur Misuari, who has been detained for

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sedition since 2001, to participate in this conference.

17. (C) Comment: Dureza appeared markedly more confident and at ease about the peace process, and was able to delineate more clearly a way forward for at least the next few weeks for both major lines of negotiation with Muslims in Mindanao.

Combined with a relative lull in the military conflict in Mindanao, and an increased emphasis on civil-military operations by the Philippine armed forces to help improve the economic and social welfare of the Philippines' poorest region, Dureza may have good cause for his cautious optimism.

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